AFRICAN TRADITION IS ESSENTIALLY ORAL. IN VIEW OF THIS, IS THERE ANY PLACE FOR ORAL ARCHIVES IN THIS DIGITAL AGE?

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Oral tradition in the African setting is linked to their ways of lives. They place great worth in oral tradition because it is a primary means of conveying their culture. It is also a mode of transmitting feelings and attitudes. This encompasses music. Oral tradition relies on the human voice to communicate varied messages. Societies have always need effective and efficient means to transmit information. African setting inclusive. Apparently Mass Communication through mass media or technology driven channels to a large number of recipients is the outgrowth of this need.

INTRODUCTION

In African societies, oral tradition is the method in which history, stories, folktales and religious beliefs are passed on from generation to generation. Webster's dictionary defines "oral" as "spoken rather than written", and it defines the word "tradition" as, "transmittal of elements of a culture from one generation to another especially by oral communication".

For the African people, oral tradition is linked to their way of life. Most African societies place great worth in oral tradition because it is a primary means of conveying culture. It is also a mode of transmitting feelings, and attitudes. For centuries, African people depended upon oral tradition to teach the listener's important traditional values and morals pertaining to how to live. Oral tradition delivers explanations to the mysteries of the universe and the meaning of life on earth. In African religion, it is the guiding principle in which to make sense of the world.

The human voice is the key element in Oral tradition. Africans have been primarily vocal people throughout their history. Language is regarded as a powerful force. Although there are many ethnic languages that coexist in Africa.

Oral tradition relies on the human voice to communicate varied messages. Dr. Vincent Muli Wa Kituku explains:

> *Voice was the vehicle in which knowledge was passed on from one generation to another. Voice unified a family, Clan, or community. Enforcement of customs depended on voice. When a person died... his or her voice was no longer to be hear. It was as if a whole library has been destroyed. Voice is important.*

Another integral part of Oral tradition is the integrating of music. Music plays an important role in African societies. According to Mbiti, "Africans are very fond of music. Therefore, music, dance and singing are found in-every community".

1.1 Archives

Archives as defined by Afolabi (1991) are the non-current records of an organisation or institution preserved as a result of their continuing value.

Music also transmits knowledge and values, and it is way of celebrating important community and personal events. Combined with oral tradition and dance, a visual art form is created for the message being communicated.

By and large, music was essentially an "oral" tradition, with the musician primarily engaged in learning the popular songs of the day by listening and practicing, and traveling around playing them to different audiences. The music was fairly easy, so that the minstrel could carry as large a repertoire as possible in his head, and was generally entertaining with lyrics relating heroic or humorous tales. Any musician was free to create his own music or lyrics, which is how new songs were produced. If popular, the music might be widely imitated, but in general songwriters received little recognition for their efforts.

Before writing, humans relied on Oral traditions to pass on information. "It was only in the 1920s - according to the Oxford English Dictionary - that people began to speak of "the media", and a generation later, in the 1950s, of a "communication revolution", but a concern with the means of communication is very much older than that". Oral and written communication played a major role in ancient cultures. These oral cultures used stories to document the past and impart cultural Standards, traditions, and knowledge. With the development of alphabets around the world over 5000 years ago, written language with ideogrammatic (picture-based) alphabets like hieroglyphics started to change how cultures communicated.

Still, written communication remained ambiguous and did not reach the masses until th Greeks and Romans resolved this by establishing a syllable alphabet representing sounds. But, without something to write on, written language was inefficient. Eventually, paper making processes were perfected in China, which spread throughout Europe via trade routes (Baran, 2002). Mass communication was not quick, but it was far-reaching (Briggs & Burke, 2002). This forever altered how cultures saved and transmitted cultural knowledge and values. Any political or social movement throughout the ages can be traced to the development and impact of the printing press and movable metal type (Steinberg, 1959). With his technique, Guttenberg could print more than a single page of specific text. By

making written communication more available to larger numbers of people, mass printing became responsible for giving voice to the masses and making information available to common folks.

1.2 Development

Information Technology is the processing and distribution of data using Computer hardware and Software, telecommunications, and digital electronics. Computers, and the electronic writing they have enabled, significantly alter Oral tradition and traditional conceptions of writing. A brief historical overview can help us better understand the effects of Computers on Oral tradition.

1.3 The Impact of Computers on Oral Traditional

The Computer, developed in the mid-twentieth Century, is undeniably a product of a literate and technological society. Information Storage and Retrieval, in computer science is a term used to describe the organisation, storage, location, and retrieval of encoded information in Computer Systems. Important factors in Strong and retrieving information are the type of media, or storage device, used to store Information; the media's storage capacity; the speed of access and information transfer to and from the storage media; the number of times new information can be written to the media; and how the media interacts with the Computer, contrary to African oral tradition where storage is believing to be the human brain and it can be added to or reduce.

1.4 Literacy to Orality

Computers re-introduce many oral characteristics into electronic writing. For example, computer-mediated communication reintroduces the qualities of temporal immediacy, phatic communion, the use of formulaic devices, presence of extra textual content, and development of community that had been characteristics of oral communication. These characteristics lead many researchers to consider computer-mediated communication what Ong (1982) calls 'secondary' orality. However, Computers are unique in that they introduce characteristics that go beyond the secondary orality evident in television, film, and other electronic media. For instance, although Computers rely on an alphabetical or symbolic lexicon, they are more than a print-reliant or "literate" medium Computers utilize print in a flexible manner, allowing immediacy in communication, while enabling a concentration on the present moment, and eliminating distance between users-all oral characteristics.

Because Computer-mediated communication allows the reader to manipulate content, it becomes even less "literate" than the print from which it stems. The reader can interact with the text on an immediate, physical level; roles of writers and readers thus become unclear. The experience becomes fragmentary and malleable, or oral, rather than tinified and stable, or literate and Information retains a fluidity in computer-mediated communication that it lacks in traditional literacy (Langstem, 1986).

Mass communication continues to become more integrated into our lives at an increasingly rapid pace. This "metamorphosis" is representative by the convergence occurring between ourselves and technology, where we are not as distanced from mass

communication as in the past. Increasingly we have more opportunities to use mediated communication to fulfill interpersonal and social needs. O'Sullivan (2003) refers to this new use of mass communication to foster our personal lives as **"mass personal communication"** where

a) *Traditional mass communication channels are used for interpersonal communication,*
b) *Traditionally interpersonal communication channels are used for mass communication, and*
c) *Traditional mass communication and traditional interpersonal communication occur simultaneously.*

Over time, more and more overlap occurs. "Innovations in communication technologies have begun to make the barriers between mass and interpersonal communication more permeable than ever". Sites such as Myspace, Facebook Xanga, Couchsurfing, YouTube, and Bebo are classic examples of mass personal communication where we use mass communication to develop and maintain interpersonal relations.

Perhaps we are turning into a "global village" through our interdependence with mass communication. Suddenly, "across the ocean" has become "around the corner." McLuhan (1964) predicted this would happen because of mass communication's ability to unify people around the globe. As our definition states, mass communication is communication that potentially reaches large audiences.

Electronic writing is characterized by the use of oral conventions over traditional conventions, of argument over exposition, and of group thinking over individual thinking. The oral conventions are evident in the way people subvert or abandon traditional conventions of grammar and punctuation in electronic writing. Meaning is very often conveyed by cues recognized only by users of computer-mediated communication. Some examples are acronyms like BTW (by the way) and IMO (in my opinion), and specialized use of topography – for example, "word" to signify italics and the use of nonverbal icons or emotions like a smiley face, which differ from traditionally recognized textual cues. Scholars have been fascinated by the inhibited, sometimes even aggressive approaches in computer-mediated communication, which is agonistic and oral in its roots. Group thinking is evident in the emphasis on "unification," of users into a "global village." A metaphor that is widely accepted in computer-mediated communication, although it still depends on isolated users.

1.5 Linearity to Connectivity

Linearity and sequentiality are integral elements in traditional writing. Ideas are expressed in a logical, linear fashion, and linear narrative forms govern most traditional writing. Electronic writing, however, subverts traditional conventions of linearity, both in interpersonal communication and in the use of hypertext on the Web. Electronic writing used for interpersonal purposes (e.g., e-mail, mailing lists) by its very nature disregards linearity in its asynchronous nature use of coherent narrative. Relatedly, with electronic writing, the permanence of the written artifact no longer exists, taking away from electronic writing an integral feature of print Written and printed texts provide readers with a concrete artifact that encourages backward and forward scanning. Electronic writing, whether it is an e-mail or a Web document, exists only in electronic space, providing the reader with vanishing words on a screen rather than a written artifact with concrete

presence. It is this lack of permanence that leads many Computer users to record data on disks or on paper.

In addition to nonlinearity and fixity, interactivity also distinguishes electronic writing from traditional writing. Hypertext again provides the definitive example The Web is a global hypertext system unique in its capacity to interface with other systems. The use of embedded links allows interactivity between the reader, author, and medium unlike African traditional means. This not only creates a unique convergence of mass media and interpersonal media where the consumer can become the provider of information, but it allows a unique re-negotiation of the writer-audience relationship. A reader perusing a traditional text is bound by the linear, two-dimensional nature of the printed word on the page to follow where the author leads The electronic nature of hypertext requires a much more active role for the reader, urging the reader to make decisions about destination and content. This process involves an ongoing dialogue between the author, the medium, and the reader, thus not only enforcing interactivity but blurring the traditional boundaries between reader and writer. Reading traditional texts is a passive and solitary activity; reading electronic texts is an active and engaging process, as the reader makes choices about where to go, and then navigates using links and online forms to get there. The interactive nature of electronic writing also creates new constraints for writers, who must become concerned with issues of design and navigability in addition to those of narrative and purpose. They cannot be separated, as it is the responsibility of the online writer to provide material that is easy for the audience to locate and navigate. The organisation of the material must be visually appealing and must take advantage of the unique interactive features of the Web. In traditional writing the publisher or editor makes material available and visually appealing.

A final active feature of electronic writing is the writer's need to learn new and chansine technologies. Although most Computer Word-processing Software has the capability of conversion to hypertext, electronic writing requires knowledge of Computers and Software.

Given that Computers are still a developing technology, drawing any definitive conclusions about the effect of electronic writing on traditional Standards of quality may be premature. It is important to note, however, that while Cyberspace is still a medium defining itself; it is one where writers are in the unique position of shaping the development of Standards and norms of writing a time that is long past in traditional writing. We should not forget that Cyberspace is made possible by technological and interpersonal interactions in real space.

Even though the print model prevails, Computers are still in development and the possibility of a concept change exists. Whichever model cotes to be accepted will influence the practice and understanding of electronic writing. Going from a print to an oral metaphor will emphasize the importance of interactivity rather than the forms of traditional writing.

An audience is more passive with hot media because there is less to filter. Television is considered a **cold medium** because of the **large amount of multi-sensory information**. The more sensory data available to multiple senses, the colder the media.

Seven functions of Mass Communication that offers insight into its role in our lives over the African oral traditions.

- **Surveillance:** The first function of Mass communication is to serve as the eyes and ears for those of use seeking information about our world. When we want to find out the latest news about what's happening, we can turn on the television, surf the interest, or read a newspaper or magazine. We rely on mass communication for news and information about our daily lives such as the weather, stock reports, or the start time for a game.

- **Correlation:** Correlation addresses how the media present facts that we use to move through the world. The information we get through mass communication is not objective and without bias,

- **Sensationalisation:** There is an old saying in the news industry - "if it bleeds, it leads" that highlights the idea of sensationalisation. Sensationalization is when the media put forward the most sensational messages to titillate consumers; "Media managers think in terms of consumers rather than citizens. Good journalism sells, but unfortunately, bad journalism sells as well. And, bad journalism - stories that simply repeat government claims or that reinforce what the public wants to hear instead of offering independent reporting is cheaper and easier to produce".

- **Entertainment:** Mass media provide us with an escape from daily routines and problems by entertaining us. Media like People Magazine and E-TV keep us up to date on the doings of our favourite celebrities. We watch sports on television, go to the movies, play video games, and listen to our ipods and radios. Most mass communication simultaneously entertains and informs. We often turn to media in our leisure time to provide an escape from our boredom and relief from the predictability of our everyday lives. We rely on media to take us places we could not afford to go or imagine, acquaint us with bits of culture, and make us laugh or cry. Entertainment can have the secondary effect of providing companionship and/or catharsis through the media we consume.

- **Transmission:** Mass media is a vehicle to transmit cultural norms, values, rules, and habits. Consider how you learned about what is fashionable to wear or what music to listen to. Mass media plays a significant role in the socialization process. We look for role models to display appropriate cultural norms, but all too often, we do not recognize inappropriate or stereotypical behaviour. We start shopping, dressing, smelling, walking and talking like the person in the music video, commercial, or movies.

- **Mobilization:** Mass communication functions to mobilize people during times of crisis. Regardless of your political preferences, we mourned as a nation and rallied around national pride and patriotism during this time of crisis. With instant access to media and information, we can collectively witness the same events taking place in real time somewhere else, thus mobilizing a large population of people for political action.

- **Validation:** Mass communication functions to validate the status and norms of particular individuals; movements, organisations, or products. The validation of particular people or groups serves to enforce social norms. If you think about most television dramas and sitcoms, who are the primary characters? What gender and

ethnicity are the majorities of the stars? What gender and ethnicity are those that play criminals or those considered abnormal? The media validates particular cultural norms while diminishing differences and variations from those norms. A great deal of criticism focuses on how certain groups are promoted, and others maginized by how they are portrayed in mass media. Given the power of the various functions of mass communication, we need to be reflective about its presence in our live and our societies over the African oral traditions.

SUMMARY

Societies have always needed effective and efficient means to transmit information. Mass communication is the outgrowth of this need, if you remember our definition of mass communication as the public transfer of messages through media or technology driven channels to a large number of recipients, you can easily identify the multiple forms of mass communication you rely on in your personal, academic, and professional lives. These encompass print, auditory, visual, and interactive media forms. A relatively recent mass communication phenomenon known as mass personal communication combines mass communication channels with interpersonal communication and relationships, where individuals are now gaining access to technology that allows them to reach large audiences compare to African Traditional means.

While mass communication is vital to the success of social movements and political participation it has seven basic functions. The first of which is surveillance, or the "watch dog" role. Correlation occurs when an audience receives facts and usable information from mass media sources. When the most outrageous or fantastic stories are presented we are witnessing the sensationalisation function of media. Needing an escape from routines or stress we turn to media for its entertainment value. As a cultural institution, mass communication transmits cultural values, norms and behaviours, mobilizes audiences, and validates dominant cultural values.

As media technology has evolved, so have the scholarly theories for understanding them. The five theories we discussed are different primarily in the degree of passivity versus activity they grant the audience. The magic-bullet theory assumes a passive audience while the two-step-flow and multi-step-flow theories suggest that there is a reciprocal relationship between the audience and the message. The theory of uses and gratification suggests that audiences pick and choose media to satisfy their individual needs. Gerbner's cultivation theory takes a long-term perspective by suggesting that media is one of my cultural institutions responsible for shaping or cultivating attitudes.

Because of mass communication's unquestionable role in our lives, media literacy skills are vital for any responsible consumer and citizen. Specifically, we can become media literate by understanding and respecting the power of mass communication messages, understanding media content by paying attention, understanding emotional versus reasoned responses to mass communication, developing heightened expectations of mass communication content, understanding genre conventions and recognizing when they're mixed, understanding the internal language of mass communication, and above all-thinking critically!

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